

**Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
“From Strategy to Implementation:
The Future of the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship”**

**Lisa Curtis, Senior Research Fellow, The Heritage Foundation¹
May 5, 2009**

Developing and implementing an effective U.S. policy toward Pakistan is one of the most complicated yet important foreign policy challenges the Obama Administration faces. Pakistan is in the midst of societal and political shifts that are challenging its leadership’s ability to maintain stability and even raising questions about the potential for an Islamic revolution in the country. Pakistan has long suffered from ethnic and sectarian divisions in different parts of the country. But the more recent threat from a well-armed and well-organized Islamist insurgency pushing for the establishment of strict Islamic law in the country’s North West Frontier Province (NWFP) adds a new and more dangerous dimension to the country’s challenges. Although the collapse of the Pakistani state may not be imminent, as some have recently argued, the government’s surrender of the Swat Valley is a major victory for Islamist extremists seeking to carve out pockets of influence within the country.

¹The Heritage Foundation is a public policy, research, and educational organization operating under Section 501(c)(3). It is privately supported and receives no funds from any government at any level, nor does it perform any government or other contract work. The Heritage Foundation is the most broadly supported think tank in the United States. In 2008, it had nearly 400,000 individual, foundation, and corporate supporters representing every state in the U.S. Its 2008 income came from the following sources:

Individuals	67 %
Foundations	27%
Corporations	5%

The top five corporate givers provided The Heritage Foundation with 1.8% of its 2008 income. The Heritage Foundation’s books are audited annually by the national accounting firm of McGladrey & Pullen. A list of major donors is available from The Heritage Foundation upon request. Members of The Heritage Foundation staff testify as individuals discussing their own independent research. The views expressed are their own and do not reflect an institutional position for The Heritage Foundation or its board of trustees.

The Costs of Surrendering Swat Valley

Islamabad's decision to allow the implementation of a parallel Islamic courts system in the Malakand Division of the NWFP (including Swat Valley) demonstrates the weakness of the Pakistan government and military in the face of an onslaught by Taliban-backed extremists seeking to take over parts of the province. The government's capitulation to the Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM), led by Sufi Mohammad, followed the group's campaign of violence and intimidation, which included the bombing of dozens of girls' schools, murder of women who declined to stop work, and public beheadings of those accused of spying.

The Pakistan military had deployed some 12,000 troops to the area for 18 months in 2007 – 2008 before surrendering to militants in the region, which apparently then numbered around 3,000 - 4,000. The surrender of Swat to the militants occurred, despite the overwhelming vote in favor of the secular political party Awami National Party (ANP) in the February 2008 elections, demonstrating the people of the region do not support the extremists' agenda but are merely acquiescing in the absence of support from the government to counter the militants.

The closing of the civil courts in Swat Valley several weeks ago has belied the Pakistan government's claim that the establishment of Islamic courts in the region would not usurp state authority. In fact, Sufi Mohammed declared in a recent interview that democracy is not permissible under Sharia law, revealing the militants' ultimate objective of undermining Pakistan's democratic institutions nationwide. Pakistani officials also gloss over the fact that the establishment of a parallel Islamic courts system will have dire human rights consequences for average Pakistanis –especially women and girls—in the region. The pro-Taliban militants have already destroyed numerous girls' schools and engaged in brutal public punishments to instill fear in the population and quell dissent from their harsh interpretation of Islam. In early April, Pakistani Chief Justice Iftikhar Ali Chaudhry raised several questions regarding a public flogging of a young woman in Swat, which had been aired on Pakistan's major media outlets, prompting many Pakistanis to express outrage over worsening human rights conditions in the region since the Taliban take-over.

Washington has repeatedly warned Pakistani officials about the dangers of appeasing the militants through peace deals that confer legitimacy on them and help them consolidate control over ever-increasing parts of the province. Pakistani officials have rejected Washington's concerns, accusing U.S. officials of hyping the threat and/or misreading the local ground situation.

Events over the last two weeks, however, may have finally awakened some Pakistani officials to the downsides of the Swat peace deal. Just one week after Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari approved the Swat Valley peace agreement following passage of a parliamentary resolution urging him to do so, the Taliban took over the neighboring district of Buner. Western media reports indicate local residents of Buner initially were prepared to counter the Taliban but were discouraged by the Government's agreement to concede Swat. A local politician told reporters that "When the (central) government showed weakness, we too stopped offering resistance to the Taliban."

The Taliban subsequently agreed to pull out of Buner district on April 24th after Pakistan deployed paramilitary troops to the region. The same day Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kiyani sent a warning to the militants by declaring that “The Army’s pause was aimed at giving reconciliation a chance and the militants must not take it as a concession...we will not allow the militants to dictate terms to the government or impose their way of life on the civil society of Pakistan.” The statement was a positive first step in clarifying Pakistani policy toward the militants but it must now be followed by sustained and consistent action based on a comprehensive civil-military plan to counter the militants’ objectives. Unless the civilian and military leadership demonstrate they are willing to defend their people against militant intimidation and violence, the Taliban will again try to encroach on other areas of the NWFP.

In the final analysis, it will be up to the Pakistani military to decide how much of the country will be ceded to the Taliban. But Pakistani military leaders rightly acknowledge that they need the public behind them before they can take on the Taliban militarily. Pakistani civilian leaders have been too slow to awaken to the threat before them and too willing to sacrifice their constituents to the brutal policies of the Taliban. The combination of fatigue from the series of terrorist attacks in Pakistan over the last two years and high levels of anti-American sentiment have been obstacles to Pakistani leaders adopting firmer policies against extremism.

For Pakistan to fend off the growing extremist influence in the country, civilian leaders need to highlight the brutality of the pro-Taliban militants. They need to demonstrate that the insurgents are forcing a way of life on Pakistani citizens that is alien to their own historical traditions of Islam and aspirations for constitutional democracy. As former Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. Maleeha Lodhi said in a recent op-ed, the Swat deal “represents a retreat for Jinnah’s Pakistan. Whatever the apologists of the deal claim, it is the very antithesis of the vision and ideals inspired by the country’s founder, the core of which was a modern, unified Muslim state, not one fragmented along obscurantist and sectarian lines.”

The struggle is Pakistan’s to fight, but the U.S. can support those Pakistanis standing up for the preservation of democratic institutions and promotion of tolerance and pluralism, rule of law, and the development of civil society. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s blunt warnings to this committee two weeks ago that Pakistan’s abdication to the Taliban was putting the rest of the world at risk were appropriate. Pakistani leaders should be reminded that their policies toward the Taliban have international ramifications.

Obama AfPak Strategy

In his speech March 27th unveiling a new strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, President Obama provided a clear signal that his Administration intends to dedicate the time, resources, and, most important, U.S. leadership necessary to stabilize the region and contain the terrorist threat in South Asia. Obama laid out a strong case for the American people on why the U.S. needs to remain committed to the region, reminding that the terrorists responsible for 9/11 remained in western Pakistan and threatened the regimes of both countries. Indicating he also understands the specific threat the Taliban pose to U.S. interests, Obama said senior Taliban leaders remain allied with al-Qaeda and “need to be defeated.”

The Obama strategy calls for intensive regional diplomacy with a special focus on a trilateral framework for Afghan, Pakistani, and American officials to engage at the highest level. The first high-level trilateral meeting was held in late February and another will take place this week. The Obama plan also emphasizes the need to establish benchmarks for the Afghan government to root out corruption within its ranks and for the Pakistan government to improve its efforts against terrorists within its borders. President Obama supports a vast increase in non-military assistance to the Pakistani people, but also explained that the U.S. would no longer provide a “blank check” to the Pakistani military and would expect more cooperation in combating the Taliban and other extremist groups.

One of the hotly debated issues surrounding the AfPak strategy is whether it is possible to establish a credible democratic process in Afghanistan. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in congressional testimony in February said the U.S. should not try to create a South Asia “Valhalla” in Afghanistan. While he is correct that we cannot expect Jeffersonian democracy from Afghanistan, it would be a false choice to say we should either fight terrorism *or* help rebuild a nation. The reality is if we want to ensure Afghanistan does not again become a safe haven for terrorists, we need to prevent hard line Islamists who support international terrorism from dominating the country. This means the Afghan people need an alternative to the Taliban. We cannot go back to the Afghanistan of the late 1990s. There needs to be a credible functioning political process for the people to support and that will prevail over the Taliban’s repressive and violent policies.

Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta, during a speech in Washington in February, noted several positive constitutional, executive and parliamentary changes in the country since 2001. He said there is now more than 500 newspapers, 20 private television channels, 90 radio stations, and dozens of special interest groups, including women’s groups, that were pushing Afghanistan toward democracy. To quote minister Spanta, “Democracy is not only desirable for the Afghan people, it is a necessity in order to overcome the fundamentalist legacy...democracy is universally applicable and Afghan citizens are ready to accept constitutional government and modern values...democratization is not a project that can be exported or given; it takes time to develop and flourish.”

Gauging Pakistani Counterterrorism Cooperation

A central part of the Obama Administration’s strategy focuses on establishing benchmarks, or metrics, to gauge Pakistan’s role in fighting al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. The U.S. should work with Pakistan to develop a new strategic perception of the region based on economic integration and cooperation with neighbors and tougher policies toward terrorists, including severing official ties with all militant organizations and closing down all militant training camps. Washington needs to demonstrate that it is interested in establishing a long-term partnership with Pakistan but make clear it will not abandon efforts to build strategic ties with India at the same time.

The re-doubling of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan should help convince Pakistanis that America will not repeat its past mistake of turning its back on South Asia like it did in the early

1990s. This fateful decision still haunts U.S.-Pakistani relations and perpetuates a debilitating distrust between our two countries.

In turn, Pakistan must end its dual policies of fighting some terrorists while supporting others. Recent revelations by the media and senior U.S. officials on continued Pakistani links to the Taliban and other terrorists targeting coalition forces in Afghanistan indicate the enormous challenge the U.S. faces in seeking a counterterrorism partnership with Pakistan. U.S. officials have long been aware that Pakistani security officials maintain contacts with the Afghan Taliban and related militant networks. Pakistani officials argue that such ties are necessary to keep tabs on the groups. There is growing recognition by U.S. officials, however, that Pakistan's contacts with these groups go beyond "keeping tabs" on them and may involve Pakistani security officials supporting, and even guiding, the terrorists in planning their attacks and evading coalition forces.

A particularly troubling relationship is that between Pakistani intelligence and militant leader Jalaluddin Haqqani who operates in the border areas between the Khost province in Afghanistan and the North Waziristan agency of Pakistan's tribal border areas. Haqqani has been allied with the Taliban for nearly 15 years, having served as tribal affairs minister in the Taliban regime in the late 1990s.

The Haqqani network has reportedly been behind several high-profile attacks in Afghanistan, including a truck bombing that killed two U.S. soldiers in Khost in March 2008 and the storming of the Serena Hotel in Kabul during a high-level visit by Norwegian officials in January 2008. Credible media reports, quoting U.S. officials, further reveal a Pakistani intelligence link to the Haqqani network's planning and execution of a suicide bomb attack against India's embassy in Kabul last July that left over 50 Afghan civilians and two senior Indian officials dead.

Continued links between extremists and elements of the Pakistani security establishment have led to confusion both within the security services and among the broader Pakistani population about the genuine threat to the nation. This ambivalence toward extremist groups fuels conspiracy theories against outsiders (mainly India and the U.S.) that are aired in the Pakistani media and lead to a public discourse that diminishes the threat posed by terrorists.

Pakistani ambivalence toward the Taliban stems from its concern that India is trying to encircle Pakistan by gaining influence in Afghanistan. Pakistani security officials calculate that the Taliban offers the best chance for countering India's regional influence. Pakistan also believes that India fomented separatism in its Baluchistan province. It is in India's interest to ensure that its involvement in Afghanistan is transparent to Pakistan. The U.S. also has a role to play in addressing Pakistani claims about India's role in Afghanistan and dismissing those accusations that are clearly exaggerated or misinformed.

U.S. Legislation

Both the "Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2008" introduced in the U.S. Senate last summer and the "Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act of 2009" recently introduced in this chamber demonstrate the U.S. interest in developing a

broad-based, long-term partnership with Pakistan. The PEACE Act, in particular is a comprehensive and detailed statement and plan of action for U.S.-Pakistan relations.

Both bills also contain language conditioning future military assistance to Pakistan. While some analysts have raised concerns that such conditions will discourage, rather than encourage, Pakistani cooperation against terrorists, others note that we must begin to develop leverage with our large-scale aid programs and ensure that U.S. taxpayer money does not indirectly end up assisting enemies that are fighting coalition forces in Afghanistan. CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus has acknowledged that U.S.-Pakistan military cooperation has improved along the Afghan-Pakistani border over the last eight months. At the same time, he has acknowledged that elements of the Pakistani security establishment retain unhelpful links to the Taliban. While language conditioning aid should avoid sending a message that the U.S. disregards Pakistani security concerns, it also needs to convey that the U.S. will not tolerate dual policies toward terrorism. Washington should acknowledge that it understands the deep-seated rivalry between India and Pakistan and will seek to play a low-key role in defusing their tensions but stop short of offering to mediate the vexed Kashmir dispute.

Some Congressional Members have expressed their view that the Pakistan military is unlikely to alter its policies of support to elements of the Taliban, and therefore the U.S. should focus the majority of its engagement in the region on Afghanistan and supporting the Afghan security forces, while giving up trying to coax greater cooperation from Pakistan. The current administration, however, is not yet ready to give up on Pakistan. Undersecretary for Defense Michele Flournoy recently told a congressional committee that Pakistan's cooperation against al-Qaeda was still an "open question" but that the U.S. needed to "test the proposition" that Pakistan's military can be turned in to a more effective and dependable partner in fighting terrorism. To this end, the Department of Defense (DoD) has proposed the "Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund" that would allocate \$400 million this fiscal year to DoD to build the capacity of Pakistan's security forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations and to assist with humanitarian relief efforts in post-combat zones in Pakistan.

Strategy Implementation: Challenges and Opportunities

Economic Assistance: The PEACE Act provides comprehensive details on the shape of future economic aid to Pakistan. In particular, the "Fortifying Democratic Institutions" provision rightly focuses on strengthening the parliament, judicial system, and law enforcement sectors. The PEACE Act also addresses the need for strong oversight and accountability in the provision and distribution of this aid. Section 302 of the Title III provision that focuses on researching and evaluating the impact of U.S. aid will help ensure U.S. assistance is not wasted or abused. Given current security conditions in Pakistan, the U.S. will have to rely on local partners to administer aid projects in the near-term. Some portion of the aid will need to go directly to the government as budget support, but the bulk of the economic aid should go through grassroots organizations subject to close U.S. monitoring.

Military Assistance: The U.S. Congress should condition future military assistance to Pakistan on Islamabad's efforts to fight terrorism and permanently break the links between its security services and elements of the Taliban and other extremist groups. Conditioning military assistance to Pakistan is necessary to demonstrate that the U.S. will not tolerate dual policies toward terrorists—and that there will be consequences for Pakistani leaders if elements of the

security services provide support to terrorists. Such consequences are necessary to stem regional and global terrorism. Conditioning military aid is not an ideal solution since it could create a backlash against the U.S. among senior Pakistani military officials who have lost nearly 1,500 troops fighting extremists along the border and hundreds of security personnel from terrorist attacks across the country over the last two years. But from Washington's perspective, the U.S. must seek to ensure that U.S. aid is not perversely contributing to undermining U.S. objectives in Afghanistan.

While seeking to stiffen Pakistani resolve against the Taliban, the U.S. must also shore up Pakistani capabilities to fight the insurgents. To this end, the Emergency Supplemental should constitute a one-time waiver to provide CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus the latitude and flexibility he needs immediately to strengthen Pakistan's capabilities to fight Taliban insurgents. While the PCCF for this year has no specific conditions attached to it, the U.S. Congress should pass a resolution or find some other mechanism to ensure that PCCF funding for future years will be contingent on whether the 2009 tranche has contributed to strengthening both Pakistan's capability and will to fight terrorism. This one-time infusion of aid allows Washington to test the proposition that the U.S. can coax greater counterterrorism cooperation from Pakistan. Meanwhile, maintaining conditions in the multi-year authorization legislation sends the signal that the U.S. will no longer turn a blind eye to information that indicates Pakistani security services are working at cross-purposes in the fight against terrorism.

Regional Strategy: The U.S. must dedicate its diplomatic resources to changing security perceptions in the region, turning Afghanistan and Pakistan away from zero-sum geopolitical calculations that fuel religious extremism and terrorism and toward a focus on enhancing cooperation and regional integration. Efforts such as the Peace Jirga process started in 2007; the trilateral military commission between NATO, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; and the establishment of border-crossing centers that are jointly manned by NATO, Afghan, and Pakistani intelligence and security officials are useful initiatives that can begin the process of changing regional security perceptions.

U.S. initiatives like the Afghanistan and Pakistan Reconstruction Opportunity Zones Act (ROZ) that would provide U.S. duty-free access to items produced in industrial zones in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan would also help the South Asia nations experience the benefits of regional cooperation. The U.S. Congress should fast-track this long overdue piece of legislation.

A transformation of Pakistan-Afghanistan ties can only take place in an overall context of improved Pakistani-Indian relations that enhances Pakistani confidence in its regional position. Washington should avoid falling into the trap of trying directly to mediate the decades-old Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, however. The U.S. is more likely to have success in defusing Indo-Pakistani tensions if it plays a quiet role in prodding the two sides to resume talks that had made substantial progress from 2004 to 2007.

Through this dialogue, the two sides strengthened mutual confidence by increasing people-to-people exchanges, augmenting annual bilateral trade to over \$1 billion, launching several cross-border bus and train services, and liberalizing visa regimes to encourage travel between the two countries. There was even progress on the vexed Kashmir issue with the two governments narrowing the gap in their rhetoric about an ultimate solution to Kashmir. Both sides referenced the idea of keeping the current boundaries intact and making the Line of Control

(LOC) that divides Kashmir irrelevant and instituting some type of joint mechanism to facilitate cooperation between the Pakistani and Indian parts of Kashmir.

The resumption of India–Pakistan talks now hinges on Pakistani steps to shut down the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), the group responsible for last November’s terrorist attacks in Mumbai. If Pakistan takes decisive action to close this group down and to prosecute the individuals involved in the attacks, Indo–Pakistani talks would likely resume, and the two sides could pick up the threads of where they left off in early 2007.

The U.S. needs quietly to help Pakistani and Indian officials develop a different security paradigm for the region that allows them to focus on containing dangerous non-state actors that destabilize both countries. The U.S. should take a more active role in ensuring Indian activities in Afghanistan are transparent to Pakistan. The U.S. should seek to allay Pakistani concerns, yet make clear that it will not tolerate unfounded Pakistani complaints and accusations. If and when bilateral Indo–Pakistani talks resume, Washington should encourage both sides to identify Afghanistan as a key plank of those discussions. Eventually, Washington should facilitate joint Indo–Pakistani development projects in Afghanistan as well as trade-transit agreements that begin to integrate the three countries economically.

Diplomacy: The U.S. should quietly encourage Pakistani leaders to develop a comprehensive plan of action to counter extremist trends in the country. Such a plan would require Pakistan’s federal and provincial civilian leaders and the army to work in tandem, reinforcing the tactics and strategies of one another. The U.S. must be careful with its public statements, expressing support for the principles of democracy and importance of respect for human rights, while seeking to ensure such statements are not interpreted as interference in Pakistan’s domestic affairs.

Coordinating with International Partners: Given the high level of anti-American sentiment in Pakistan, Washington will need to coordinate its policies closely with other countries interested in promoting stability in Pakistan. The Tokyo donors’ conference held in late April succeeded in raising pledges of over \$5 billion for Pakistan, demonstrating broad international support for the country. The development of the “Friends of Democratic Pakistan” initiative also has been helpful, but the group’s profile should be raised and the meetings should be more organized and formal with the objective of encouraging Pakistan to remain on the democratic path and to foster a stable economic and political environment conducive for greater international investment.

Conclusion

The U.S. needs to do everything it can to help stabilize Pakistan, while recognizing that Washington’s best efforts alone will not be sufficient for the task. Pakistani leaders also must step up to the plate and demonstrate they are fully committed to bringing peace and security to the region and are willing to stand up to Taliban advances in their own country. Given the fluidity of the current political situation, the U.S. must also develop contingency containment strategies that guard against the possibility of terrorists gaining access to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons arsenal.